

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
16 May 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Soviet Presence In Yemen

1. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The USSR has played a significant role in Yemeni developments through its assistance to the UAR's intervention in the civil war as well as through its direct economic, political, and military support for the revolutionary regime.

The Current Situation

2. We estimate there are approximately 700 Soviet economic and military technicians in Yemen, although some [REDACTED] put the total at about 900. (For comparison, there are 2,155 in Egypt and 1,250 in Iraq.) [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The bloc had found, during earlier aid efforts in Yemen, it was unable to depend on local labor and consequently introduced large numbers of bloc laborers to perform basic construction activities. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] projects requiring

Soviet technicians and laborers include a housing development and kerosene-tin factory at Hudaydah, an "international" airport, and a cement plant at Sana.

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Future Developments

6. In expanding its presence in Yemen, the USSR is undoubtedly aware of possible strategic advantages in the establishment of Soviet influence. Expansion of Yemeni airfields, for example, could presage an effort to gain civil air rights, and, at a later date, to convert this access for military purposes. Soviet interest in developing

the port facilities at Hudaydah also might be a clue to Moscow's hopes of eventually using the port as a logistic base for supporting strategic naval operations (notably submarine operations) across the Indian Ocean and into Southeast Asia. Other strategic Soviet military installations, such as missile bases, would not provide coverage of new targets of importance in the East-West military balance, even though they would carry major political implications.

7. While we recognize that these further developments of the Soviet program bear watching, at the present time we do not have any evidence that the Soviets have raised demands either in Sana or Cairo for independently controlled military facilities or bases in Yemen. The Soviets obviously intend to enlarge their presence and influence. They are likely to request civil air rights to be used in connection with penetration of Africa. However, there are important limiting factors on the range of the USSR's ambitions. The unstable political situation in Yemen does not make it a particularly attractive target for large-scale Soviet involvement. The primitive economic structure of the country is also an inhibiting factor.

8. An even more important inhibiting factor is Moscow's desire to avoid antagonizing Nasir unless the benefits were clearly of major importance. In view of the heavy Egyptian commitment in protecting and securing the revolutionary regime against the royalists backed by Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and in view of Nasir's desire to develop Yemen as a pliant ally which will follow his lead in foreign policy and Arab politics, a Soviet attempt to establish a dominant influence in Yemen's affairs would inevitably incur Nasir's hostility. While the USSR will obviously not allow Nasir a veto over its major policy objectives in the Middle East, it has invested heavily in its long-standing policy of supporting Nasir, and is unlikely to risk jeopardizing this relationship for marginal gains in Yemen. The Yemeni Government, as an Egyptian satellite, is, in any case, no more likely to agree to the establishment of Soviet bases than is Nasir himself.

9. On balance, we think the current phase of Soviet activity in Yemen stems from Moscow's usual attempts to take advantage of new opportunities for extending its influence in the Arab world, rather than an immediate Soviet build-up on the pattern of Cuba. Soviet assistance to the revolutionary regime is part of the USSR's general policy of supporting Arab nationalist regimes with the long-range aim of reducing Western influence and encouraging regional instability which, the Soviets hope, will provide increasingly attractive targets for exploitation.

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